

## *Colonization of Western Sahara*

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In this article, I'd like to write a short analysis about the colonization of Western Sahara because as a candidate for a doctor's degree, I'm making some research about the UN peacekeeping mission in Western Sahara (MINURSO). I think, that we have to see a global picture when we make a research about any peace keeping, peace support or peace enforcement mission, because without the background of the conflict, we can't get a correct view.

Up till now altogether – including me – 20 Hungarian officers and approximately this many police officers have served in the mission. Maybe that is why, and also due to the lack of concrete Hungarian interests the Hungarian Defence Forces have relatively few information on this territory and the developments here. Nowadays, a small Hungarian contingent (7 people) serves in MINURSO. However, nobody made any analysis about the Western Sahara case till today. Only I made some small articles in various newspapers previously. For this reason I chose this theme to make a dissertation about MINURSO and the Western Sahara case. In Western Sahara, there is a long time clash between the real inhabitants of the land (named Sahrawians) and the newcomers from Morocco. Unfortunately, it is not so easy to understand the conflict, if we don't know the history of this land, especially about the Spanish colonization and their role in this conflict. Hopefully, this article will give some idea for the readers about this matter. But first I'd like to share some basic information about Western Sahara.

### **Geographical features, climate**

The area lies in North Africa, on the coast of the Atlantic Ocean. It is bordered by Morocco in the north, Algeria in the east (they have 42 kilometers of common boundary) and Mauritania from the east and south. Its area is 266,000 square kilometers. Just like in most African countries, the borders were marked out by the colonial powers by ratifying different treaties, agreements. The borders of Western Sahara were regulated and marked out by the agreements signed by Spain and France in 1900, 1904 and 1912.<sup>1</sup>

Its lowland area is plain, sandy and rocky, with a few hills in the southern and north-eastern parts. These hills are at an altitude of not more than 400 meters.<sup>2</sup> Its lowest point is

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<sup>1</sup> Erik Jensen: *Western Sahara. Anatomy of a Stalemate*. 24.

<sup>2</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 19–23.

Sebjet Tah, 55 meters below sea-level, while the highest is a 721 meter high hill, which has no official name.

Western Sahara can be divided into three main regions.

The north-eastern zone is a rocky desert (*hamadas*) spreading from the chains of the Atlas mountain to the Zemmour mountains. Mountain chains of volcanic origin of different sizes and unique hanging rocks can be found here. Water is scarce in the area, there are only few scattered wells. Despite the relative lack of water, many species of plants and animals live in the area.

The second zone is called the area of the river by the locals because temporary rivers run through it. It is bordered by the Draa valley from the north, and the valley of the Jat river from the west. The water gathers in these valleys during the short rainy seasons in the autumn. Due to the very high temperatures, water evaporates very quickly, so it never reaches the Atlantic.<sup>3</sup>

The Saguiat el-Hamra (the Red River) can be found in the “river-zone”. The importance of this particular river is revealed in the fact that the region was named after it. Vegetation suitable for grazing is significant on the banks of the rivers and near Smara. The local inhabitants also grow barley and other crops. The flora and fauna are a bit more versatile here than in the rocky territory called hamadas. Oases of different size offer some additional colours to the scenery. The size of the oases can vary from a few hundred square metres up to the size of a smaller village.

The third zone is called the Rio de Oro. This is an extremely plain area, interspersed with sand dunes. Due to its composition, the soil is unable to hold and store water, so the water gathers in the sub-soil, which makes it possible to dig wells in such areas.<sup>4</sup>

The monotony of the area is broken by the Dakhla Peninsula (formerly: Villa Cisneros) and the La Guerra. The desert here includes the coastline of Western Sahara (1,100 kms) and Mauritania (754 kms). Rainfall is very low but due to the humid air arriving from the ocean, conditions are favourable for a lot of plant and animal species and the migratory birds arriving from Europe, which spend the winter here.<sup>5</sup>

Around the coastline, apart from a few minor settlements, there are no living habitations. The majority of the people there earn for a living as fishermen or by raising camels. Their number increases with the approximately 160,000 Moroccan fishermen, who work on the coastline temporarily in the summer and early autumn.<sup>6</sup>

Although I have not included it in any of the zones, there is a special desert environment: the area of the salty lakes (Saharan halophytics). This type of area is located around Bir Lahlou and the Mehaires patrol route in Mauritania. Places like this are called *chott* by the Arabs and some of the local nomads gain salt there which is so important for them.

The climate of the Sahara is continental; the winters are cold and dry, while the summers are extremely hot. The temperature can rise above 50 degrees in the shade. Due to the proximity of the ocean, the humidity is relatively high so the weather is humid and

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 25–27.

<sup>4</sup> János Besenyő: *Western Sahara*. 13.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Mephram – R. H. Hughes: *A Directory of African Wetlands*. 89.

<sup>6</sup> Mohammed Baddyr – Sylvie Guenette: *The Fisheries off the Atlantic Coast of Morocco 1950–1997*. [http://www.seaaroundus.org/report/datasets/Morocco\\_Baddyr1.pdf](http://www.seaaroundus.org/report/datasets/Morocco_Baddyr1.pdf) (downloaded: 08.12.2010.)

foggy. The average rainfall is merely 45 mms, even in Dakhla, which lies on the ocean shore.<sup>7</sup>

Wind is a major problem all over the territory of the Sahara as it carries the sand particles. It can cause skin irritation or inflammation of the eye. Thus, the locals always cover their head and face with a scarf. The most unpleasant of these winds is the windstorm called 'Irifi', which can cause a sandstorm merely by its strength. The wind arriving from the north-east is called 'Sirocco' by the Europeans. The Sirocco is extremely dry and hot and covers everything with sand. Visibility becomes extremely limited; it is reduced to 1 or 2 metres. The storms occur between October and March, but sometimes in the summer, though, not very frequently.<sup>8</sup>

## People

The Sahrawian social structure is similar to that of the other nomadic or partially-settled tribes living in the Sahara. The most fundamental agency of society is the family. Families in blood relation constitute a tribe (Fakhd or gabila), the leader of which has special rights in organising and directing the life of his tribe.<sup>9</sup> The leading position (sheikh) is mostly hereditary, passing from father to son, while members of the family or the tribe belong to different classes on the basis of their birth or occupation. It is possible to pass from one class to another based on individual talent but it happens very rarely. However, marriage between a man and a woman coming from different classes is practically impossible.<sup>10</sup>

Sahrawian men consider their pipe as a status symbol. They are made of several different metals, but all men strive to have one of silver.

Locals constitute more than twenty major tribes, which can be divided into three main groups: Ouled Delim, Reguibat and Tekna. Beside these there were minor tribes in occasional alliance or at occasional wars with each other. Though maintaining a rather loose relationship with each other these tribes had substantial autonomy on their own territories.<sup>11</sup>

The Sahrawian tribes are not all of Arabic origin as the Arabic tribes occupying the region mixed with local Berber tribes. Nevertheless, there remained some relatively clean blooded Berber tribes like the majority of the Reguibat tribal union, originating from the Sanhaja Berbers, who occupied the region before the Arab conquest. Later they accepted groups of Arabic descent, but Berber traditions are exceptionally strong both in their language and in their culture.<sup>12</sup>

The descendants of the Makuil tribe (Beni Hassan tribe) and tribes like Ouled Delim, Ouled Arousien and Ouled Bou Sba arriving from the area of present-day Yemen in the 13th century are among the clean-blooded Arab tribes.

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<sup>7</sup> Robert Mephram – R. H. Hughes: *Ibid.* 87.

<sup>8</sup> János Besenyő: *Ibid.* 14.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Lawles – Laila Monahan: *War and Refugees. The Western Sahara Conflict.* 32.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Hart: *The social structure of the Rgibat Bedouins of the Western Sahara.* 517.

<sup>11</sup> János Besenyő: *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>12</sup> Lloyd Cabot Briggs: *Tribes of the Sahara.* 231–232.

Tribes of Arab origin are very proud of their roots and clean blood. For example, the members of the Ouled Delim tribe can trace back their origin as far as Delim, the son of the supposed founder of the Beni Hassan tribe. They are the most populous tribe in Western Sahara and they consider themselves the cleanest blooded Arabs in the Sahel region.

The tribes and the different unions were organised on a regional basis, therefore most tribes of the Sahara still live and migrate with their animals within the same area to the present day. The territories of the clean-blooded Arab tribes were referred to as the land of the whites i.e. "*Trab el-Beidan*" although this area was further divided into smaller regions.<sup>13</sup> The most famous of these was the "*Sahel*" which was later completely occupied by the Spanish, who called the natives Ahel el-Sahel i.e. "the people of the Sahel" after the name of the region.<sup>14</sup>

Having examined the regional aspects of the Sahrawians it is also interesting to look at the typical occupations they pursued.

Some tribes were mainly soldiers and in return for their armed assistance smaller tribes paid a kind of tax (*debiha*). These tribes provided armed escort for the caravans, though in case a rival tribe was commissioned to do the task they would attack and attempt to rob the traders not employing them. These tribes were known as "the people of arms".<sup>15</sup> Tribes of this category were the following: Reguibat Sarg, Reguibat Sahel, Izarguen, Ait Lahsen, Arosien, Oulad Delim, Yagout, Ait Musa Oulad Ali, Azouafit, Ait Usa and Oulad Bou Sbaa.

Tribes that were conquered or forced to pay tax had the common name (*znaga* or sometimes *lahma*) and although they were not slaves they had a very similar status to the Helotes in the military state of Sparta. Stronger tribes would often attack and rob the *znaga* tribes with the pretext of a military exercise in order to practise their fighting skills and weapons handling. The word *znaga* comes from the Sanhaja Berbers and it denoted the Berber ruling class before the Arabs. The meaning of the word was slightly modified in the 15th and 16th centuries and the Spanish used it for the non-Arabic, but Berber origin nomads who did not adopt the Hassania dialect, but preserved their mother tongue. Later the word lost its ethnic meaning and was only used in connection with tribes that had the status of slaves or that were tax payers.<sup>16</sup>

People of *znaga* status were neither allowed to carry weapons officially in the presence of members of superior tribes, nor to sit in the middle among their guests in their own tents. This was a very serious offence among the people of the Sahara. Subordinate tribes would often pay for the protection with animals or forced labour (*horma*).<sup>17</sup> Mostly the smaller tribes living along the coastline belonged to the *znaga*, like: Foicat, Imeraguen, Le Menasir, Meyat, Lamiar, Oulad Bou Aita, Oulad Abdeluahed and Ouled Tidrarin.

Some tribes whose members studied the Qur'an all their lives and worked as teachers of the religion were referred to as "*zuaia*s". Members of these tribes were called "people of the book" (*as ahel ktub*). These tribes had high esteem and possessed deep respect. Nevertheless, stronger tribes made attempts to suppress them from time to time. That

<sup>13</sup> Richard Lawles – Laila Monahan: *Ibid.* 33.

<sup>14</sup> Tony Hodges: *Historical Dictionary of Western Sahara*. 9–11.

<sup>15</sup> John Mercer: *Ibid.* 126.

<sup>16</sup> János Besenyő: *Ibid.* 30.

<sup>17</sup> Lloyd Cabot Briggs: *Ibid.* 216.

happened to the Ouled Tidrarin tribe, which after several years of desperate fight became tax payer of the Ouled Delim tribe in the 18th century, thereby losing their position among the religious tribes became znaga.<sup>18</sup> Ahel Berical<sup>19</sup> and Tendega belong to the “zuaia” but there are some tribes along the coast which are also members of this group, like Kenta and Terquez.<sup>20</sup>

In order to avoid the taxpaying status some tribes tried to prove their Arabic descent, therefore, they would manipulate their family trees to get the honorable “*chorfa*” status (descendant of the Prophet). This, of course, led to a boom in the industry of pedigree forging, which used to be fashionable in Hungary, too (i.e. proving non-existing nobility or sheepskin). The following belong to the Chorfa tribes: Reguibat Sarg, Reguibat Sahel, Arosien, Oulad Bou Sbaa, Ahel Sheikh Ma El Ajnin, Filala and Toubalt.

The tribes of Arabic origin (descendants of the Beni Hassan tribe) had the status of free fighters which meant the highest level in the traditionally weapon-using Sahrawian society. Although they also mixed with Berber tribes during their history, they are still regarded as clean-blooded Arab tribes. They are the following: Oulad Delim, Tekna, Escarna, Oulad Gailan, Oulad Lab and Chenagla.

Members of the Tekna tribe live mainly in South Morocco, in an area spreading from the Anti-Atlas Mountain to Saguia el Hamra. They consider themselves descendants of the Lemtula (Berber) tribe and the Makuils.

Because of the latter they are also listed among the clean-blooded Arabs. The Lemtula tribe had already lived in the Oued Noun region, which later became the centre of the Tekna tribal union, by the time of the arrival of the first Makuil groups (1218). The tribe following a nearly two-century fight finally assimilated into a group of the Beni Hassan thereby forming a new tribal union named Tekna.<sup>21</sup>

During the centuries the tribal union was divided into two opposing groups, Ait Yemel “El Gazzi” and Ait Atzman (Ait Bella).

The tribes introduced above present only a relatively narrow cross-section of the Sahrawian tribes. There are approximately 120 minor and major tribes in the region of the Western Sahara, which are related to each other live separately though.<sup>22</sup>

Beside the tribal leaders who represented the executive power there was an advisory council called Djemma which was made up of the delegates of various tribes. This council was dissolved without a trace with the creation of the Polisario.

At war time a war council was established in order to fend off external threat. When the community was divided by internal conflicts like the more than thirty-year-long war between the tribes of Reguibat and Tadjakent,<sup>23</sup> or the disputes about the use of wells, the Council of Fourty (Ait Arbajn) was established.<sup>24</sup> This organization, which none of the neighbouring countries ever employed or even was aware of, always had a job to do

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* 212–13.

<sup>19</sup> James Stuart Olson: *The Peoples of Africa. An Ethnohistorical Dictionary*. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Tony Hodges: *Ibid.* 9–10.

<sup>21</sup> John Mercer: *The Sahrawis of Western Sahara*. 5.

<sup>22</sup> János Besenyő: *Ibid.* 34.

<sup>23</sup> Lloyd Cabot Briggs: *Ibid.* 82.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 81–82., 219.

because the tribes were very likely to solve their disputes with the use of weapons, and also stronger tribes liked looting smaller and weaker ones.<sup>25</sup>

Another specific office that the Sahrawians had was one which we today would call an ambassador (*kafir*). It was a person delegated and authorized by the tribes to officially represent them at the neighbouring tribes.

It is interesting to know that the women of Western Sahara as opposed to the tradition of the neighbouring countries take part in the work in several ways. For example, in Mauritania it would be impossible for a woman to milk the animals while among the Sahrawian people it is a woman's job. Nowadays, women have a very important role in society because the number of men living in the refugee camps is very small. As a result, they have to do jobs which were considered to be men's responsibility earlier.<sup>26</sup>

To this day camels have a very high value for the locals. The possession of a camel is a kind of status symbol in society. Even though the number of nomads have decreased considerably there are still Sahrawians possessing herds of several hundred animals. The price of a camel is nearly 10-12,000 dirham (USD 1,000-1,200), and it still happens that on signing the marriage contract the negotiated "price" of the bride is paid in camels.<sup>27</sup>

The Sahrawians are proud of their origin and although they still keep in evidence where they come from, the tribal ties are much looser today especially among town dwellers and also because of the different ways of living they lead. This is due to the fact that the Moroccans forced the majority of the Sahrawians who had led a nomadic life for centuries to settle down in cities.

Although the majority of the Sahrawians have settled down in the towns with the lack of stable job opportunities they just increase the number of those who live on social aids. When the locals made a living from shepherding and trade the number of able-bodied men receiving social aid was minimal, while today the majority of men living in towns are unemployed. Extensive unemployment soon results in a state where unemployment is accepted and work and the old way of life devalue. As a result, people living on social aid become more vulnerable (financially and politically) since they are unable to keep themselves up without social support.

Sahrawians speak the Hassaniya dialect of Arabic, but since the occupation of the region they have mostly used the Moroccan Arab dialect.<sup>28</sup> A lot of them also use Spanish, the language of the former colonists, and thanks to state education the number of French speakers has considerably increased recently.<sup>29</sup>

The majority of the population is Sunni but there are some Shiites and some Christians (mostly Catholic) among them. Sahrawians are characterized by a high degree of religious tolerance both within and outside their communities.

The estimated population of the Sahrawians living under Moroccan rule is 90,000, but there are about 120,000 refugees in Algerian camps (Tindouf) and an additional 30-40,000

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Hart: *Ibid.* 515–527.

<sup>26</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 162.

<sup>27</sup> Mark Hart: *Ibid.* 515–527.

<sup>28</sup> Eric L. Wolf: *Európa és a történelem nélküli népek*. 54–55.

<sup>29</sup> János Besenyő: *Ibid.* 36.

abroad in different countries. However, Polisario leaders think, if they gain their independence and all Sahrawians return home, at least there could be 750,000 inhabitants.<sup>30</sup>

## Economy

According to the latest research findings, Western Sahara is extremely rich in minerals, particularly in phosphate, iron ore, uranium, titanium, natural gas and oil.<sup>31</sup> Some geologists say that vanadium is also abundant in this territory enough to consider its mining, which then would result in high profit.<sup>32</sup> The Spanish found oil already in the 1960s, however, they did not attempt to launch offshore drilling due to the underdevelopment of the area in economic terms.<sup>33</sup>

Under the seafloor of coastal waters several American and French companies (Kerr-McGee and Total Fina Elf) conducted oil research and their findings indicate rich reserves off the coasts of Western Sahara.<sup>34</sup> However, oil production was impossible to launch because of the objections of the Polisario and several other organizations. Companies hope for settling the problems related to the disputed territories and plan to start oil production only afterwards. Europe holds interests in Western Sahara through SADR covering almost 80,000 km<sup>2</sup> of exciting exploration acreage. The Tindouf licence has great potential for both conventional and unconventional gas resources, being geologically similar to the prolific Algerian Palaeozoic basins. The Aiuun Basin is an Atlantic margin basin similar to that developed along the West African margin. Until the political situation is resolved in Western Sahara, these licences remain in *force majeure*.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, the coastal waters comprise one of the richest fish areas in the world and fishing right is also disputed by the opposing parties.<sup>36</sup> Spanish and Moroccan ships were confiscated by Polisario guerrillas several times when those had no license from them. When in December 2002 a tanker sank at the Spanish coast a lot of Spanish fishermen lost their jobs due to water pollution. Both the Moroccan Government and the Polisario proposed the fishermen to use the territorial waters for fishing. Moroccans also have major revenues from fishing and processing sea fish.<sup>37</sup>

Naturally, it is not only Moroccan fishermen who do fishing in these waters as both the European Union and other countries lobby in Morocco for licences of fishing in the region.<sup>38</sup> Exercising fishing rights is a delicate issue and triggered several conflicts between Moroccan authorities and ships under foreign flags.

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<sup>30</sup> Toby Shelley: *Endgame in the Western Sahara*. 86–88.

<sup>31</sup> Claes Olsson: *The Western Sahara Conflict. The Role of Natural Resources in Decolonization*. 20.

<sup>32</sup> Toby Shelley: *Ibid.* 77–78.

<sup>33</sup> Richard Lawles–Laila Monahan: *Ibid.* 36.

<sup>34</sup> Claes Olson: *Ibid.* 18.

<sup>35</sup> <http://www.europaoil.com/operations/western-sahara.aspx> (downloaded: 08.12.2010.)

<sup>36</sup> Richard Lawles – Laila Monahan: *Ibid.* 71.

<sup>37</sup> Mohammed Baddyr – Sylvie Guenette: *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> F. Ugboaja Ohaegbulam: *Ethnic Issues in U.S. Policy on the Western Sahara Conflict*. 99.

Agriculture in the area is minimal: arable lands and oases, where fruit (dates) and some vegetable production is dominant, makes up a mere 5% of total production. Another 19% of the region is suitable for pasturage of camels, sheep and goats, done mainly by nomads.<sup>39</sup>

Yet another significant part of the population is involved in handcraft and home industry. Using semi-precious stones and remains of stones of animals beautiful jewellery is made which is sold mainly to tourists. Silverworks and leather-craft are also traditional trades. Although living standards in the occupied territories are well below the Moroccan average, still, it is higher than of people in Polisario-controlled territories. Nowadays, tourism began to develop, however, due to the unsettled status quo organised tourism industry could emerge only in the territories occupied by Morocco. Nevertheless, some “adventurers” take the risk to venture into the so called “free territories”.<sup>40</sup>

The majority of foreign investors come from France and Spain because both historic and economic relations between firms from these European countries and Western Sahara remained.

In accordance with the provisions of the current ceasefire agreement, and decision of the United Nations, Morocco is not allowed to build roads or exploit the natural resources of the country until the final settlement of the status quo.<sup>41</sup> This provision of the agreement is, however, frequently ignored, for example in the Guerguerat region near the Mauritanian border a road was built with the involvement of the armed forces and the construction of fishing villages is also in progress along the Western Sahara coastline.<sup>42</sup> To date 6 such villages had been built, and in the 2002 regional budget resources for another 6 settlements were earmarked.

The reason is that in the seas rich in fish some 140,000 Moroccan fishermen work temporarily who stay on the Western Sahara coast during the fishing season as they are unable to make a living in Morocco.<sup>43</sup> In spite of their merely USD 7-a-day wage they support their families in Morocco. Besides the existing fish processing factories (Layoune and Dakhla) operating at full capacity further factories are planned to be built.<sup>44</sup>

As the above data clearly indicate, Morocco gained significant economic opportunities through the occupation of Western Sahara. For this and some other reasons (nationalism, Berber separatist movements, etc.), it does not intend to return the area to the sahravians.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, local inhabitants can expect only partial autonomy within Morocco as the Moroccan armed forces will never withdraw from Western Sahara voluntarily.

<sup>39</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman: *A Tragedy of Arms. Military and Security Developments in the Maghreb*. 59.

<sup>40</sup> Toby Shelley: *Ibid.* 94.

<sup>41</sup> United Nations Security Council Document S-2002-161 (12.02.2002.). <http://www.undemocracy.com/S-2002-161.pdf> (downloaded:03.12.2010.)

<sup>42</sup> Claes Olsson: *Ibid.* 20.

<sup>43</sup> Toby Shelley: *Ibid.* 75.

<sup>44</sup> János Besenyő: *Ibid.* 25.

<sup>45</sup> Claes Olsson: *Ibid.* 21.



## Colonisation powers in the early times

Europeans arrived to the Canary Islands first (1309), which they could only occupy by 1401, due to the resistance of the Guanche population. Jaime Ferrer sailed along Boujdour not much later, in 1346, however he never returned home from his voyage of discovery.<sup>46</sup>

As the Spaniards almost exterminated the native population of the Canary Islands there was no sufficient labour force available for cultivating the land therefore slave-hunting expeditions were launched to the coasts of the Sahara. The first raids were somewhere at coastlines of Boujdour in 1405, where a complete caravan was looted, the captured Sahrawians were sold as slaves at a good price.<sup>47</sup> The Spaniards having become enthusiastic over the success of the first escapade repeated the slave-hunting journeys called “*entradas*” or “*cabagadas*” for almost two centuries. Certainly, it could not be officially declared that only the slaves are required, therefore they hid their real intentions behind the likeness of Christian mission work.<sup>48</sup>

The very first colony created by Europeans was established by the Portuguese in Ceuta (1415), than mapping the neighbouring areas began, till in 1433–1434 the expedition led by a Gil Eanes and Alfonso Goncalves Baldaya reached Cap Bojador, the coastal region of present day Western Sahara.<sup>49</sup>

During the following expedition, which was led by Goncalves and Nuno Tristao, the Portuguese captured 12 nomads, among whom only a few could speak Arabic as they were of Berber origin. During the expedition in the year of 1440, as many as 235 nomads were captured who were partially sold to the Spanish.<sup>50</sup> By that time a sort of competition evolved between the Spaniards and Portuguese in slave-hunting.

A short while later the Portuguese, systematically mapping the coastline, established their first trade-station on Isle of D’Arguin (1445), slightly South of Cap Blanc.<sup>51</sup>

Portuguese historian Gomes Eannes de Azurara wrote about the expedition of Joao Fernandes in one of his books. The Portuguese explorer set foot on the shores somewhere near to Dakhla in 1445 and prepared a detailed report for the Royal Court. In his report he mentioned that the nomads living there had hardly resembled those living in the territory of Morocco, even the language they spoke was different, and it was the religion alone that was identical as they also recognized Mohammad as their Prophet.<sup>52</sup> In the meantime the Portuguese realized that its more simple to purchase cheap slaves from tribes of the Sahara, then organizing risky surprise raids, therefore they establishes trade relations with several coastal tribes who sold black slaves and gold to them.<sup>53</sup> Black slaves were transported from the town of Ouadana to the Isle of D’Arguin, which meant a merely six-day long journey. Slave-trafficking had been organized from there for about two hundred years by the

<sup>46</sup> M. D. D. Newitt: *A History of Portuguese Overseas Expansion, 1400–1668*. 11.; Rákóczi István: *Tengerek tengelye. Ibér terjeszkedés az Atlantikumban a 15–16. században*. 78.

<sup>47</sup> Erik Jensen: *Ibid.* 23.

<sup>48</sup> Tony Hodges: *The Roots of a Desert War*. 17.

<sup>49</sup> Rákóczi István: *Ibid.* 209–216.

<sup>50</sup> Sík Endre: *Fekete-Afrika története*. I. kötet. 103.

<sup>51</sup> Donald L. Wiedener: *A History of Africa South of The Sahara*. 39.

<sup>52</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 79.

<sup>53</sup> M. D. D. Newitt: *Ibid.* 30–31.

Portuguese and annually thousands of slaves had been transported from the island.<sup>54</sup> Later the islands had been occupied by the British (1666), then the French (1667), finally by the Dutch (1685–1721).

The Holland bought up the acacia gum (*Acacia verec*) originated from Mauritania, which was used in their textile plants set up in Portendick in Africa. The nomads tap this type of acacia tree today too and use it for textile dying, or make jewels out of its hardened version. Although the Dutch captured the Isle of D'Arguin in 1638, later they had to give it up to the French, in this way they completely disappeared from this area (Hague Convention, 1727).<sup>55</sup>

By the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> Century, the right of control the area from Cap Bojador up to Agadir, including the Canary Islands (1480, Toledo Convention), was awarded to Spain in accordance with the resolution of Pope Sixtus VI.<sup>56</sup>

At the end of the century Diego Garcia de Herrera, the governor of the Canary Islands erected a fortress (Santa Cruz de Mar Pequeña, 1476) and permanent colonies (Ifni) but only in the coastal zones as Spain had not taken the risk of permanent settling although by that time they had already led several expeditions to the inner areas of the Sahara. In fact Herrera had built the new fortress in order to store captured slaves, since the Spanish exterminated the entire population of the islands of Fuerteventura and Lanzarote. Their raids were launched from this fortress and the captured slaves were transported to the Canary Islands from here. The success of the slave-hunters is marked by the fact that local tribes laid a siege against the fortress within two years after its building and the garrison had only been saved from massacre by the relief troops of 700 men urgently sent by the governor. As slave-hunting was extremely lucrative and the Court acquired one fifth of its total revenue from this source the raids continued. A slave-hunter, Juan Camacho participated in forty-six actions in 1491 alone, which, in his narration, were all successful. Nevertheless, when Governor Herrera died (1485), the fortress was abandoned and the local tribes demolished it at once.<sup>57</sup>

However, the Spanish sovereigns henceforward needed the revenue derived from slave-trafficking therefore the fortress was rebuilt and operated as a trading centre onward. In October 1550 the Spanish King appointed Captain Alonso Fernandes de Lugo from Andalusia to the Captain of Africa, and ordered him to establish new fortresses. The Captain had three new fortresses constructed: the fortresses of Taghaost, San Miguel de Saca and Cape Bojador. The fortress of San Miguel de Saca was attacked one night prior to its completion by the local nomads, who butchered more than 300 Spanish soldiers, even the life of Lugo was saved by his interpreter, originated from the tribe of Ait Bou Tata.<sup>58</sup>

The increasing number of slave-hunting sorties infuriated the local tribes to such an extent that finally they declared a holy war, jihad. The attacking Bedouins seized and demolished the fortress of Santa Cruz in 1517, massacred the resisting forces and the survivors were sold in style as slaves. The Arabs attacked the slave-ships sailing under Spanish and other flags, later they attacked the settlements in the Canary Islands.

<sup>54</sup> Donald L. Wiedener: *A History of Africa South of The Sahara*. 46–47.

<sup>55</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 94–95.

<sup>56</sup> Tony Hodges: *The Roots of a Desert War*. 21.

<sup>57</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 84–85.

<sup>58</sup> János Besenyő: *Ibid.* 47.

They also sent the captured people to slave-markets. As a repercussion of this, the Spanish officially banned the actions, expecting the Saharans to end their pirate raids, too. Yet, the unpermitted slave-hunting expeditions deluding superabundant return went on till 1593.<sup>59</sup>

However, the lost revenue was supposed to be replaced somehow, therefore the discovery of the fish exuberant off-shore waters came in time. The Spanish concluded several fishing agreements with coastal tribes who granted free fishing or had not attacked the fish-drying plants established on the shores.<sup>60</sup> However, the Spaniards had no intention to share the territories with other Europeans, thence when the Scottish George Glas established a trading station opposite the Island of Fuerteventura (1764), he was imprisoned by the Spanish, and the station christened Hilsborough was set ablaze. The Scottish businessman was arrested when he went to Lanzarote Island to purchase a ship and recruit a new crew. Although he got restored to liberty from his one-year long imprisonment by the intervention of the English Government, the building of the trading station that had remained unhurt so far were destroyed by the nomads.<sup>61</sup>

In 1727 the Spanish and the Sultan of Morocco, Sidi Mohamed ben Abdallah signed the Treaty of Marrakech. However neither the Kingdom of Spain, nor the Kingdom of Morocco could handle the piratical tribes, which is proven by their agreement on common fishing, concluded on 28 May, 1767. The agreement provides exclusive fishing rights to Spain in the coastal waters from Santa Cruz (Ifni) to the Northern borders. Nevertheless, Article 18 of the agreement well indicates the existing problems of the two states in this region:

“His Imperial Majesty will refrain from considering the determination of His Catholic Majesty, according to which He desires to settle to the South of Ved Nun, because He will not be able to assume any responsibility for those accidents and misfortunes, which may be having regard to His empery does not extend this far, and the nomadic and sanguinary people of this country will always cause damages to the inhabitants of the Canary Island, among whom many have been taken captive.”<sup>62</sup>

This agreement was amended several times in the forthcoming years, but this article had steadily been remained in it.

It is to be known that Morocco had never been a national state till the 20<sup>th</sup> Century but it consisted of a Principality of several areas independent from each other. Many a time the Monarch had no power over the tribes living in that area, thus they could live according to their own law. The area under the control of Moroccan leadership (*makhzen*) at that time was called as “*bilad el-makhzen*”. The majority of those cities and oases where the Moroccans established their authority and the representatives of the Sultan (*kaid*) exercised the control over the area belonged here. However, there were areas, which were only known as “*bilad es-siba*” at that time, which meant the land of refugees, i.e. absconders.<sup>63</sup>

<sup>59</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 88–90.

<sup>60</sup> Igaz Levente: *Egy elfelejtett válság politikai háttere: Nyugat-Szahara*. 82.

<sup>61</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 91–92.

<sup>62</sup> Tony Hodges: *The Roots of a Desert War*. 31.

<sup>63</sup> C. R. Pennell: *Morocco since 1830. A history*. 28–29.

The Rif Mountains populated by Kabyles, the Berber settlements of the Atlas Mountains, and the northern part of Western Sahara also belonged to these areas.

Although the Sultans of Morocco officially expressed their empery over these areas their power and military strength was enough to control the most important trading stations and cities only. There were periods, when the Sultans were not able to control a given area for many decades, or even for a century. Still there were such tribes, which attached importance to maintain relations with the Sovereign of Morocco, therefore they entered into an alliance (*bayaa*) with him, and the Sultan appointed the chief of the tribe by a decree (*dahir*) as his representative. A few tribes of the Sahara also entered an alliance with the Sultan but there were some tribes which fled from his reign to the Sahara, like the tribes of Arosien, Ait Lahsen, or Ouled Bou Sbaa. Nevertheless, the Reguibat tribes, which constitute almost 60 per cent of the Sahrawian population, had never signed any document, which would have provided legal title to the Sultan to hold dominion over them.<sup>64</sup>

The fact that the Sultan of Morocco had no influence over the Sahrawian tribes caused several problems not only to the Spanish but to the French diplomacy too, as the mediation of the Emir of Mauritania was needed to ransom French seamen shipwrecked at the coasts of Western Sahara. Since the Emir maintained good connections with the 'Council of Forty', he could have successfully negotiated between the parties.<sup>65</sup>

Alexander Scott was among the shipwrecked mariners who suffered shipwreck between Cape Noun and Tarfaja in 1810. The captors of the sailor sold him as a slave to a warrior from the Toubalt tribe, who had been his master for five years. When Scott was travelling in the Atlas Mountains with his owner he escaped and was assisted home by an English major in official mission in that locality.<sup>66</sup> That was the time when leaders of Spain decided to occupy the coastal lines of Western Sahara, partly to eliminate the pirate actions, partly to defend the Canary Islands.

## Spanish occupation of Western Sahara

The leaders of Spain announced to establish a protectorate on the area from Cap Blanc to Cap Bojador in December 1884. This idea was later approved and then legitimated by the participants of the Berlin Conference on 26 February, 1885.<sup>67</sup> The Spaniards created the *Compania Comercial Hispano-Africana* on 30 March, 1884 on the model of the well functioning North-African Company (Mackenzie Company, Cape Juby) with English-Scotch interest.<sup>68</sup>

Several people participated in the company, who took positions in the top political or economic leadership of the kingdom restored in 1874. According to their concept, the Kingdom of Spain, having lost her power and vegetating like her own imperial shadow ought to have established new colonies, particularly on the territories of Africa not

<sup>64</sup> John Mercer: *The Sahrawis of Western Sahara*. 5.

<sup>65</sup> Tony Hodges: *The Roots of a Desert War*. 31–32.

<sup>66</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 99.

<sup>67</sup> János Besenyő: *Ibid.* 49.

<sup>68</sup> Tony Hodges: *The Roots of a Desert War*. 33–36.

occupied by other European countries. The concept was promoted by king Alphonso XII himself and he donated 3,000 Pesetas to the company, which collected 37,000 Pesetas within a short time, covering the expenses of two expeditions.

The first expedition led by Manuel Iradier, Amando Ossorio and Bernabe Jimenes headed to the area of Equatorial Guinea, while the other group led by Emilio Bonelli Hernando went to Western Sahara. The concept of founding colonies had been approved by royalist, conservative Prime Minister Canovas del Castillo, however, the Government resigned in the meantime, thus only the minister of foreign affairs of the new Government could order the army to conquer the unoccupied coasts of the Sahara.

The Spanish unit led by Captain Emilio Bonelli Hernando conquered Dakhla (Villa Cisneros), where they erected a fortress and established the mail-service. Only 25 soldiers served in the fortress at that time, who were rotated in three month periods when the ship with the supplies from the Canary Islands arrived. Bonelli became the first military commander, who had been living in Morocco for more than six years therefore he was fluent in Arabic and could develop good connections with the representatives of the local tribes. The captain made a proposal to the government to establish further stations along the coastline (Angra de Cintra, Cape Blanc and Rio de Oro).<sup>69</sup>

To provide protection to the coasts of the Sahara and the newly established settlements the Government sent a considerable fleet reinforcement to the Canary Islands with the order to pacify the shores of Western Africa. By April 1886 the Spanish penetrated inside the continent and appointed the first Governor, who represented the Government in the area.

With the aid of a Spaniard speaking Arabic perfectly the Spanish managed to find several local representatives of the tribes, who were ready to sign an agreement recognizing the Spanish control (Iyill Convention).<sup>70</sup> In spite of the fact that their representatives had signed the Agreement the tribes represented by them took up arms against the Spanish troops marching in. The Sahrawian tribes organized several insurrections against the Spanish power of occupation, and they assaulted the fortress of Villa Cisneros in 1887, then they attacked the fort in 1892 again, while in 1894 they set fire to ships "Tres de Mayo" and "Las Marias", anchored in the bay.<sup>71</sup>

All that the Spanish managed to achieve was a single agreement signed on behalf of the Sahrawian tribes by Ould Laroussi, the chief of one of the Ouled Delim tribes. Namely, the tribal leader recognized that it was easier to trade with the Spanish than to fight against them. Of course, complying the agreement was not meant by other tribes, so the skirmish went on.

The Sahrawian tribes still independent from Spain fought a battle at Daora in 1899 against the troops of the Sultan of Morocco, where they prevented the Moroccans to gain grounds in the Sahara area.<sup>72</sup> In the meantime the Spanish wanted to ensure their rights already won against the French and other European states, therefore they came to an agreement with France occupying Moroccan and Mauritanian territories on disputed border issues. As a result of the negotiations the first French and Spanish border agreement was

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<sup>69</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 106–107.

<sup>70</sup> Igaz Levente: *Ibid.* 82.

<sup>71</sup> Tony Hodges: *The Roots of a Desert War*. 43.

<sup>72</sup> Tony Hodges: *Historical Dictionary of Western Sahara*. 23.

ratified on 27 June, 1900, which was amended by secret agreements, signed on 3 October, 1904 and later, on 27 November 1912.<sup>73</sup>

These agreements established the borders which were also approved by the contemporary states, with the sole exception of present-day Morocco. The borders were also established within the framework of a new agreement in 1954. Despite the successful Spanish and French diplomatic co-operation the Spanish were able to effectively act only in the coastal areas while the French managed to gain grounds in the Sahara areas faster and more spectacularly. That is why Sheikh of Smara Ma El-Ajnin, a religious leader of Mauritanian descent asked the help of the Moroccan ruler to fight against the French (1905). The popular religious and military leader known by the nickname 'Ma El-Ajnin' (Water of the Eyes) did not belong to any Sahrawian tribe.

The latter holy man of the Sahrawian tribes was born in Hodh, near the banks of the River Niger around 1830–31, under the name of Mohammed Mustafa Ould Sheikh Mohammed Fadel.<sup>74</sup>

His family came from Tafilalet (South-East Morocco) and moved to Hodh in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. His father, Mohammed Fadel Ould Mamin, was one of the most honourable religious leaders (*marabu*) of the city, who founded the Kadirija denomination of Sufism (Muslim religious school). As a tradesman Ma El-Ajnin moved to the North-Western part of the Sahara in 1859, close to Tindouf city founded by the Tadjakent tribe a few years earlier. When he arrived to this area he had already performed his pilgrimage to Mecca thus he received great prestige among those people living here, who had never reached Mecca.<sup>75</sup> Because he maintained good connections with the members of the Alavita dynasty it is not surprising either that in 1887 the then Monarch of Morocco appointed him his official representative to the nomads of the Sahara, who already worshipped him as a saint. When the construction of the city of Smara founded by him had begun, the then Sultan Moulay Abdelaziz sent masons and building material (timber beams and other material not available in that region) to expedite the construction.<sup>76</sup>

However, the Sheikh worried about the headway of the French, who approved a plan in 1899, the developer of which proposed the creation a French protectorate from Senegal to the River Draa. In the spirit of the plan the French had occupied the entire territory of both Algeria and Tunis by 1903.<sup>77</sup> The fortified city of Brakna, the last refuge of the resisting Arab warriors, was conquered by Xavier Coppolani of Corsican origin in French service by the end of 1903. Thus there was no more considerable power in the North, which could offer resistance against the colonization intentions of the French, although the French commander and a few soldiers were slaughtered by the nomadic troop led by Sidi Seghir Ould Moulay Zein in the village of Tagant later on, when he stood overnight in the local caravansary in transit with a few soldiers (12 May, 1904).<sup>78</sup>

According to the French assumption the raid was ordered by Ma El-Ajnin. Of course, the assassination could only temporarily delay the French, who soon appointed a new

<sup>73</sup> *Algeria–Western Sahara (Spanish Sahara) Boundary*. 3.

<sup>74</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 111.

<sup>75</sup> Lloyd Cabot Briggs: *Ibid.* 218–219.

<sup>76</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 112.

<sup>77</sup> Virginia McLean Thompson – Richard Adloff: *The Western Saharans. Background to Conflict*. 42.

<sup>78</sup> Tony Hodges: *The Roots of a Desert War*. 57.

commander to lead their troops. The French troops started to occupy the still independent little desert state, Adrar at that time (9 January, 1909). The French defeated the resisting tribes (Ouled Delim, Reguibat, and Aroussiyine tribes) in several battles, which surrendered after losing their leaders and most of their warriors.<sup>79</sup>

That's the reason why Sheikh Ma El-Ajnin tried to counterbalance the French headway by founding a new town, present day Smara, in the territory still under Spanish control (1898). The town was located between Tindouf and Adrar, near a busy caravan route, and the good lands and well suitable for grazing further increased its value. The construction of the main buildings of the town was completed by 1902 and Ma El-Ajnin dislocated his headquarters here for good.

It is interesting that the Sheikh did not regard the Spaniard so dangerous, who really had control over the three major cities strengthened by them, namely Villa Cisneros (Dakhla), La Guerra and the port of Cabo Juby (Tarfaya), and Sidi Ifni later. Therefore the patrolling warriors of the Sheikh left the Spanish patrols in peace, moreover, they even exchanged commodities with the smaller Spanish military posts, where they could pay for tea, sugar, flour and other commodities with their products (furs, stock, dates, etc.). As the Spaniards had not represented a considerable threat, the chiefs of the local tribes rather focused on the attacks against the French forces.<sup>80</sup>

As early as 1902 the French launched an expedition to the Sahara, which surveyed the area of present day Western Sahara and Mauritania, and also collected information for the French troops (Blanchet expedition) springing to attack soon afterwards. One of the members of the expedition, lieutenant Jouinot-Gambetta in his report warned the French military leadership about the dangerousness of the Sheikh:

“Ma El-Ajnin, alias Mohamet Fadel, who lives among the locals is a truly fanatic Muslim, and according to his vision their faith will triumph and by that they will overcome the infidels occupying their land.”<sup>81</sup>

The new town, Smara, soon became the spiritual centre of the nomads of the Sahara, from where they started to organize the armed uprising against the French. According to the concept of the Sheikh, they could have joined the factious tribes with the support of Morocco then they could have announced a holy war (jihad) against the infidels. The Monarch of Morocco first promised his support for the revolt, but he compromised with the French later, and then the betrayed Sheikh attacked Morocco. His troops comprising of Sahrawian and Mauritanian tribes occupied Marrakesh, but suffered defeat at Fez on 23 June, 1910 from the better equipped and trained French troops led by General Moinier.<sup>82</sup>

The Sheikh died within a few months, and his sons El-Hiba and Mohammed Laghdaf continued the struggle, however, they were far from being as talented strategists and spiritual leaders as their father. The reputation of the Sheikh is also shown by the fact that

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<sup>79</sup> Porch Douglas: *The Conquest of the Sahara*. 213–214.

<sup>80</sup> John Mercer: *The Sahrawis of Western Sahara*. 5.

<sup>81</sup> James J. Cooke: *New French Imperialism 1880-1910: The Third Republic and Colonial Expansion*. 138.

<sup>82</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 114.

his descendants, as an independent tribe, became a part of those living in Western Sahara and had seats in the 'Council of Forty', later even in the Djemma.

The tribes of Western Sahara continuing their struggle used the area of Saguia El Hamra under Spanish rule as the background-base of the fight against the French.<sup>83</sup>

As Spain was greatly disturbed by the French intention to develop a bordering colonial empire on the territory of Western Sahara, there was not any particular Spanish intervention against the Sahrawians. Moreover, there are evidences of paying monthly salary for Laghdaf even in 1919, so that he would not attack Spanish military check-points and other interests.

It is also surprising that the movement with considerable religious background and declaring all-out war against Christians had procured the majority of their weapons from the companies Woerman of Hamburg and Torres of Barcelona.<sup>84</sup>

That was also well-known by the French military high command, therefore army units penetrated the territory of Saguia El Hamra under the cover of chasing rebellious tribes several times. During one of these attacks the units of Mouret comprising of the Senegal Rifle and Kounta, Oulad and Ghalian tribesmen Gendarme following a more than 800-kilometre-long forced march captured and later demolished Smara together with its Library founded by Sheikh Ma El-Ajnin.<sup>85</sup> More than 5,000 valuable, ancient manuscripts were stored in that library, a significant part of which perished. This march is mentioned by the French even today as a daring military action as the lieutenant colonel departed with his unit from Atar Garrison on 9 February and arrived in Smara on 1<sup>st</sup> of March.

Laghdaf tried to force a battle with the French troops leaving the town, therefore he lured them to the environs of Leburat. He passed false information to the French that he had barely 250 armed men, therefore they could surely expect a victory, but in reality, he had 1,200 warriors, mostly from the coalition of Reguibat Sarg and Sahel tribes. The Sahrawians attacked the rearguard of the French camping in the Valley of Tagliat (Oued Tagliat), and also the units sent to their rescue, finally completely surrounded the troops of Mouret (10 March).

The raid was just partial success, since the total losses of the 400-strong French unit after the battle were two officers (Lieutenant Morello and Captain Verhardt) and 28 enlisted, while more than 200 soldiers of Mouret were wounded. Finally the French retreated toward Mauritania, but the Sahrawians were unable to exploit their dubious victory, as they suffered the loss of nearly 100 men and the discouraged desert warriors refused to chase the French any further.<sup>86</sup>

After the lost battle Mouret (according to his memoirs, at least) could have defeated the Bedouins led by Laghdaf, however, he ordered retreat to the French Garrison in Atar city (28 March, 1913), where his units were originally stationing.

Otherwise the French deny the fact of setting the library ablaze. According to their story the soldiers of Mouret only placed mines under the most important buildings, in order to demonstrate their determination to the local population, but they did not detonate anything.

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<sup>83</sup> Lloyd Cabot Briggs: *Ibid.* 227.

<sup>84</sup> Tony Hodges: *The Roots of a Desert War.* 58–60.

<sup>85</sup> B. G. Martin: *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth-Century Africa.* 137.

<sup>86</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara.* 114.



Although, due to an unfortunate accident (lightning) a part of the library really took fire, but they rescued the books, a part of which later went into Moroccan possession somehow.

Two French travellers in 1931 still saw the books, and the airplanes of the French colonial army took photos on Smara to prove to the world that their predecessors did not destroy the city.<sup>87</sup> The photos were published in a Moroccan daily, even so, the descendents of the Sheikh have possessed no reliable information about the library to this day.

There was no significant fighting on this territory during World War I, apart from a smaller marine conflict, in which two German cruisers encountered with one of the battle ships of the British Fleet near to Dakhla. Naturally the German high command tried to engage French troops in the Sahara, as well; therefore they delivered weapons and other equipment to El-Hiba. The UC20 submarine sent by the Germans reached the coastlines of the Sahara on 15 October, 1916, where Edgar Probst, the consul stationing in Fez earlier handed over 600 modern weapons and the letter of the Ottoman Sultan to the Sahrawians. On his way back the Spanish captured the German envoy near Tarfaya and deported him to the Canary Islands.<sup>88</sup>

As France and Spain did not wage war on each other, the Spanish authorities tried to consolidate the relations of the territory under their rule.

The Spanish Governor, Francisco Bens Argandona, appointed in 1903, established good relations with the Ouled Delim, Ouled Bou Sbaa and Arosien tribes. The veteran of the Cuban war overbore the members of the tribes with his unescorted trips in the Sahara area, accompanied by a few Sahrawians. However, his friendships with the Sahrawians was not looked with favour by the French, and when he met with Sheikh El-Hiba, who was one of the leading personalities of the uprising against France, they protested in an official note against contravening the agreement between the two states. During the 22 years of his governorate he founded the second settlement, Cabo Juby (29 June, 1916) of the conclave on the previous location of the North-West African Company of Mackenzie. The next settlement, which was occupied and fortified by the Spanish under his command, was the city of La Guerra (27 November, 1919).

Although the Spanish Government officially banned the occupation of the settlement, they easily occupied the city with three officers and two platoons of the 66 infantry regiment under the shroud of the night. As a matter of course, the leadership in Madrid, previously worried about the attack of the French and the local nomads, declared the entire operation their own success. Anyhow, the capture of the new city counter-balanced the trading influence of the nearby French city, Port Etienne.<sup>89</sup>

703 Spanish soldiers served at the areas of the Sahara at that time, out of which 121 in Villa Cisneros, 159 in La Guerra and 423 in Tarfaya. The strength of the contingent in Tarfaya was increased due to the airfield and the proximity of the French forces. 6 military airplanes (Henkel aircraft) had been deployed at the airfield since 1928.

In the meantime the new French Governor, General Gaden, developed new plans to pacify the nomads living on the territory. However, the situation in Mauritania and some

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<sup>87</sup> David Hatcher Childress: *Lost Cities of Atlantis. Ancient Europe & the Mediterranean*. 242.

<sup>88</sup> Tony Hodges: *The Roots of a Desert War*. 60.

<sup>89</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 118.

parts of Western Sahara began to consolidate only later, after the Battle of Trefiya in 1925, where the French completely eliminated the troops of the rebel tribes.

Nevertheless, the raids went on and the situation in the Sahara worsened so far that France threatened Spain with the occupation of Spanish-controlled territories in 1934, if Spain could not hold up law and order there.<sup>90</sup>

In order to demonstrate the seriousness of the situation the French troops led by Colonel Trinquet occupied the town of Tinduf, which was an extremely important strategic point, and was annexed it to Algeria within a few years.<sup>91</sup>

The resistance of the Sahara tribes had become exhausted by then, and when the revolt of Ait Ba Amrane tribe was suppressed in the same year (4 March, 1934), the nomads definitively gave up to maraud the French territories.<sup>92</sup>

The Spanish, led by Captain Galo and Lieutenant Carlos de la Gandara, sent their camel detail comprising of Sahrawian soldiers to Daora. Following the occupation of the town the scarcely defended city of Smara was also occupied by the Spanish, where they established a permanent garrison.<sup>93</sup> Nevertheless, they were able to completely occupy the areas of Western Sahara only by 1936, then they deployed garrisons (Zug, Tichla, etc.) there and renamed the territory Spanish Sahara.<sup>94</sup>

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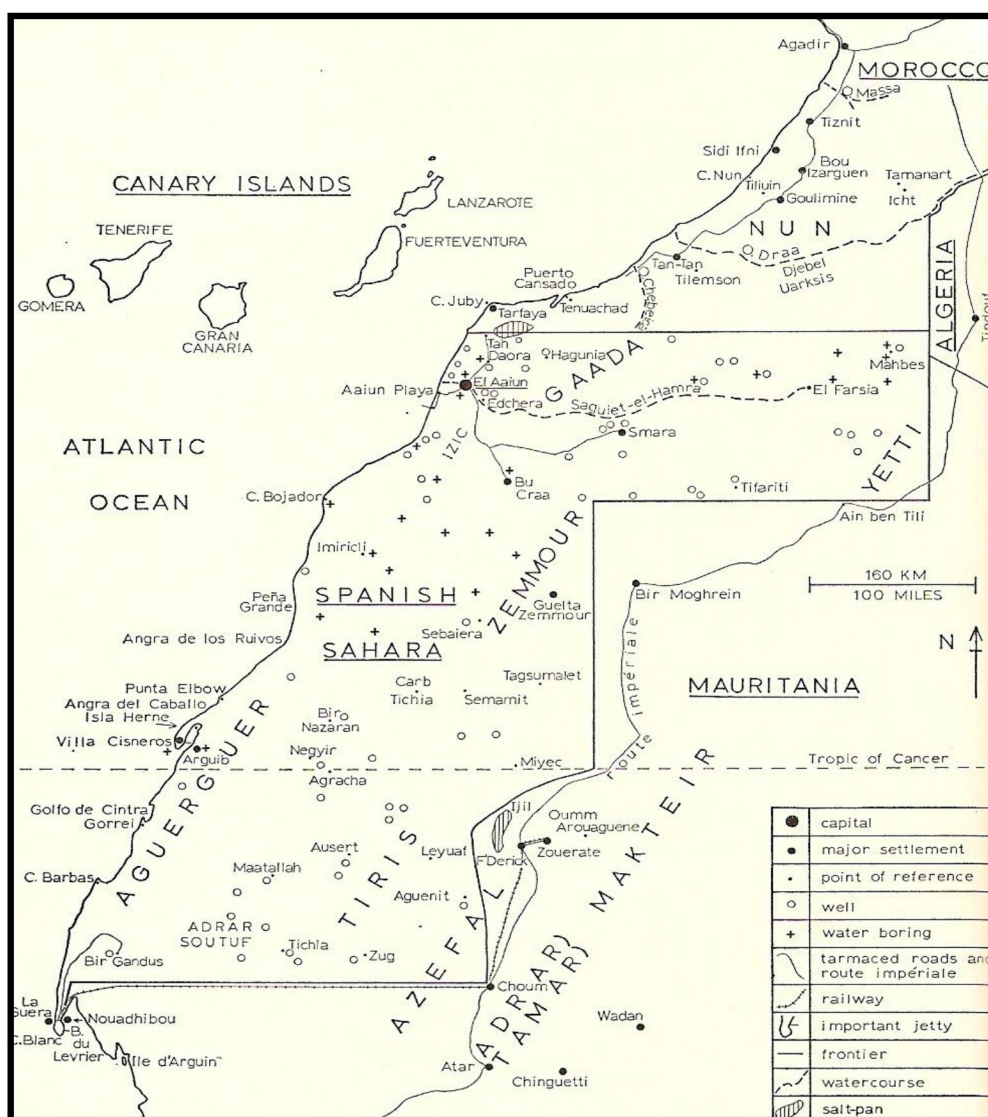
<sup>90</sup> Toby Shelley: *Ibid.* 19.

<sup>91</sup> John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. 116.

<sup>92</sup> Lloyd Cabot Briggs: *Ibid.* 236.

<sup>93</sup> Toby Shelley: *Ibid.* 188.

<sup>94</sup> Tony Hodges: *Historical Dictionary of Western Sahara*. 6.



Sources: John Mercer: *Spanish Sahara*. George Allen & Unwin, London, 1976.